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February 11, 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

As you know, there is great pressure within the government in favor of a drastic decision with regard to Cuba.

There is, it seems to me, a plausible argument for this decision if one excludes everything but Cuba itself and looks only at the pace of military consolidation within Cuba and the mounting impatience of the armed exiles.

However, as soon as one begins to broaden the focus beyond Cuba to include the hemisphere and the rest of the world, the arguments against this decision begin to gain force.

However well disguised any action might be, it will be ascribed to the United States. The result would be a wave of massive protest, agitation and sabotage throughout Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa (not to speak of Canada and of certain quarters in the United States). Worst of all, this would be your first dramatic foreign policy initiative. At one stroke, it would dissipate all the extraordinary good will which has been rising toward the new Administration through the world. It would fix a malevolent image of the new Administration in the minds of millions.

It may be that on balance the drastic decision may have to be made. If so, every care must be taken to protect ourselves against the inevitable political and diplomatic fall-out.

1. Would it not be possible to induce Castro to take offensive action first? He has already launched expeditions against Panama and against the Dominican Republic. One can conceive a black operation in, say, Haiti which might in time lure Castro into sending

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a few boatloads of men on to a Haitian beach in what could be portrayed as an effort to overthrow the Haitian regime. If only Castro could be induced to commit an offensive act, then the moral issue would be clouded, and the anti-US campaign would be hobbled from the start.

2. Should you not consider at some point addressing a speech to the whole hemisphere setting forth in eloquent terms your own conception of inter-American progress toward individual freedom and social justice? Such a speech would identify our Latin American policy with the aspirations of the plain people of the hemisphere. As part of this speech, you could point out the threats raised against the inter-American system by dictatorial states, and especially by dictatorial states under the control of non-hemisphere governments or ideologies. If this were done properly, action against Castro could be seen as in the interests of the hemisphere and not just of American corporations.
3. Could we not bring down Castro and Trujillo at the same time? If the fall of the Castro regime could be accompanied or preceded by the fall of the Trujillo regime, it would show that we have a principled concern for human freedom and do not object only to left-wing dictators.

If the drastic decision proves necessary in the end, I hope that steps of this sort can do something to mitigate the effects. And, if we do take the drastic decision, it must be made clear that we have done so, not lightly, but only after we had exhausted every conceivable alternative.

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Arthur Schlesinger, jr.

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